

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Extension Service

Washington 25, D. C.

THE RURAL HOMEMAKER IN DEMOCRACY

By

May Cresswell, Mississippi State Home Demonstration Agent

A distinguished Home Economist (Lita Bane of the University of Illinois) in a radio address, gave a definition of HOME which she worked out by setting down on paper, a list of the things she herself wanted her own home to be. Here in effect, are her words: "First, I wanted a home that was the abode of persons bound together by ties of affection:

Affection of parents for one another and for their children and all family members.

A place where the immature are protected and guarded.

A place where one may have rest and privacy.

A place where one may keep his treasures.

A place where one may satisfy his individual tastes.

A place where fundamental culture consisting of customs, languages, courtesies and traditions are conserved and passed on to the young.

A place where altruism, unselfishness, and other worthy character traits are generated and cultivated.

A home is a haven, a sanctuary, a source of inspiration.

A place where one may enjoy his individual kind of recreation and share it with others.

If the family is to be happy and healthy the home must furnish most of the things needed for health and happiness. The home must furnish plenty of good food, good clothing, and other personal needs, good places for rest, for study and for work. Here too, family members should find places and equipment each for his own kind of recreation, and the pursuit of his hobbies. Most of all there must be mutual respect, affection, tolerance and loyalty. Someone has said that a happy and satisfying family life is the best foundation for a lasting democracy. The citizen who has experienced freedom and justice and happiness as a result of democracy in home and national life, will have something to defend and can probably be depended upon to help preserve that way of life.

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Presented at Annual State Home Demonstration Council Meeting during Farm and Home Week, August 2, (1949.)



Let me repeat for you here the ten things rural homemakers and home economists say Home Demonstration Work has done for rural women:

1. Broadened the horizon of rural women. "We enrich the lives of others when we help them to see and understand the world in which we live."
2. Home Demonstration Work was the first thing that taught rural women techniques and advantages of organized and group action.
3. Home Demonstration Work has made rural women recognize the worth and dignity of home making and changed the attitude of farm women toward home making. They look on it today as an art instead of drudgery.
4. Electricity on the farm and labor saving equipment in the home have given the rural women more leisure time, and given her relief from many of her burdens.
5. Women have recognized the necessity for building up farm life on its social as well as its productive side.
6. Tours have given impetus to home improvement, landscaped yards and painted houses.
7. Better dressed, well groomed rural women.
8. Development of community spirit.
9. Development of leadership.
10. Reading program - world neighbors.

Let us think together for a little while about some of the things you yourselves are doing and some of the actual results of your efforts in your home demonstration clubs.

First - let's have a look at our agricultural background. There are in operation today in Mississippi approximately 263,528 farms. 121,215 of these farms are operated by white farmers and 142,313 by colored farmers. 37.7 percent of the farmers in Mississippi own their own farms and 62.3 percent are non-owners. Cotton is grown in 76 of our 82 counties and about four out of five farmers in the State grow some cotton. Extension sponsored a seven-step cotton program which helped more than 121,000 cotton farmers increase their earnings from each acre of cotton. From the raising of beef cattle, hogs and sheep, Mississippi farmers in 1947 reported an income of \$62,000,000.00. More than 25,000 farmers improved their methods in livestock feeding in 1948 and dairy farmers continued to improve production by providing better grazing, more stored roughage and better handling of dairy products. Poultry farmers reported a net profit of \$26,000,000.00 in 1948. Did you know that 86 percent of all Mississippi farmers raise some poultry? Did you know that farmers in the Morton area alone produce about 100,000 broilers a week while the Tupelo area grows, processes and sells about 15,000 broilers a week.



The production and marketing of truck crops brought \$7,500,000.00 to Mississippi farmers in 1948.

The production and sale of timber from the farm woodlands brought in more than \$4,500,000.00 to the Mississippi farmers.

Farmers are accepting the advice of county agents and farm leaders in further mechanization of farms, in better soil conservation practices and in increased use of electricity on the farm and in the home. For example: During 1948, 44,430 farm families in Mississippi used electricity for the first time.

Now, where do the farm homes in Mississippi which you represent, figure in this program of better production, better marketing methods and soil improvement?

During 1948, you had a membership of 20,466 in slightly under 1,000 home demonstration clubs. During 1949, according to the report in our office, we have had new clubs organized and new members brought in. The final count will come in November. What will our records show then? The Home Demonstration Clubs in 1948 and 1949 have studied home problems, problems of county, State and Nation. 75 percent of your clubs had a community 4-H Advisor in 1948 and each County Home Demonstration Council now has a county 4-H Advisor, if our reports are accurate.

You will be interested to know that according to your Better Homes report, a total of more than 10,000 kitchens were improved during 1948 in 77 counties. Slightly more than one-half of this kitchen improvement was done in the homes of Negro families. Approximately 18,000 women reported some home improvement prior to July 1, 1949. In the clothing field, you reported such demonstrations as Better Buymanship, improvement of children's clothing, more careful budgeting of the clothing dollar, the cleaning and care of the family clothing and better construction practices.

You definitely entered the Health Education field in 1948 with the employment of a specialist in Health Education. You have held programs on sanitation, on control of disease, on better family relations including the care and training of children. You gave attention to the importance of all home demonstration club members getting physical examinations regularly. In 1948 five counties set a goal of all club women having physical examinations. The result was not 100% but actually two out of three women in the clubs in these five counties had physical examinations for themselves.

47,000 families were influenced by home demonstration agents and home demonstration clubs to prevent or control such diseases as typhoid, diphtheria, and small pox. You definitely entered into the campaign for the study and control of cancer and for the eradication of Venereal disease.

In the field of foods and nutrition, Extension agents have records of 58,000 families whom they helped directly or indirectly to can more than 5,000,000 quarts of vegetables and to store, freeze or dry more than 7,000,000 pounds of food. Of course you know that these figures could never be accurate. There is no way to get a record of every jar or pound of food put into someone's pantry through your efforts and through your influence.



Improving the diet and health of Mississippi families is still one of the main objectives in home demonstration work. You promoted the cause of better nutrition by your help with school lunches, with the garden program, and with a general program of education in nutrition.

You will be interested to know that Negro home demonstration agents helped more than 10,000 Negro families to improve the screening or to screen for the first time, and helped more than 15,000 families to follow other methods of controlling flies, mosquitoes, and other insects. Over 36,000 Negro families took advantage of the various health clinics provided by the State Department of Public Health. You and your home demonstration clubs have helped these Negro families in many instances to see the importance of taking advantage of every activity planned by the State Department of Public Health, to eradicate disease and improve the general health and vigor of the population.

Nearly 52,000 white farm families reported that they definitely made changes in homemaking practices due to their participation in the home demonstration program. Home demonstration agents also worked with more than 14,000 town and city families. Thus 66,000 white families reported some change for the better in their homemaking methods. Negro agents reported more than 51,000 homes where definite improved practices had been adopted.

You gave active support to 4-H Club work and to work with older youth. The fact that Mississippi had in 1948 a total of 101,659 boys and girls enrolled in 4-H Club work, did not happen by accident. More than 4,000 women leaders helped to direct and encourage and strengthen 4-H Club work and work with older girls.

You gave attention in your programs to better reading and better educational influences in general for families in your circle of influence. An experimental reading project conducted in five counties during the months of March through June of 1949, showed that home demonstration club members are ready to read good books themselves and to bring books into the home for the pleasure and the enlightenment of their families. In these five counties 2,386 books were accepted and read. These books were from selected and approved lists, some fiction, some dealing with homemaking, some with family relations, child care and training, with history, government and with world affairs. Everyone knows that the four spring months probably are the least favorable for a project of this kind since farm families are particularly busy at this season. The State Library Commission the Public libraries and the Extension department, hope that a reading project on a twelve month basis may be incorporated into your home demonstration plans for 1949-'50.

You have shown your interest in increasing the family income and in a definite saving program for the family. Home demonstration markets alone brought \$97,622.65 into the pockets of Mississippi farm families while miscellaneous marketing by farm women amounted to \$162,049.00. Negro homemakers working through Negro home demonstration agents prepared and marketed products to the amount of \$112,713.00. Through cooperative buying and selling, Mississippi farm families saved almost \$1,500,000.00 on more than \$18,000,000.00 handled. More significant still is the fact that more than 22,000 families studied their own buying problems and studied ways and means of spending their profits wisely on home beautification, home equipment, better recreation, and more educational advantages for the family.



The active interest of home demonstration clubs in providing two 4-H Club camp sites equipped for safe and healthful recreation for 4-H Club boys and girls, was evidenced by the pledge of the home demonstration clubs to help finance this undertaking. The \$1.00 per member campaign which you voluntarily undertook is underway. We might do well to inquire into progress there in order that definite figures may be sent out to the clubs at the end of the year. The \$100.00 contribution from the Southwest district and the \$500.00 from the State Home Demonstration Council have been made. Sincere thanks and congratulations. HOME DEMONSTRATION CLUBS LEAD THE WAY.

The five well-planned district home demonstration council meetings in the spring of 1949 reported an attendance of 1,774. These district meetings serve an important purpose in the year's work. They bring the leaders together, give opportunity for checkup on the progress of the program and provide an incentive for intensifying work during the remainder of the year. The fact that the district meetings are held at colleges, gives opportunity for the college faculties to know something of Home Demonstration Work and more important still, for individual home demonstration members to learn first hand about the colleges, to become acquainted with some of the faculty members, and in order that they may know where their boys and girls are going to school, and what is to be offered in the way of training and inspiration. The district meetings are growing rather large so that in one case at least this year, the attendance had to be limited. With a little more planning perhaps the colleges might arrange to take care of the increased attendance. All college authorities have expressed themselves to me as being intensely interested in these meetings and through these meetings the entire Home Demonstration program.

There are in attendance at this, your annual business meeting, 464 home demonstration club officers and members with voting delegates from 79 county home demonstration councils. Plans are completed and money in hand for the tour to National Home Demonstration Council meeting in Colorado Springs, Colorado, October 3 - 7. They tell us for sure that there will be room in that resort city for all comers, so if you change your plans at the last minute and decide to drive out you can no doubt find accommodations. 44 delegates from 25 counties have signed up for the tour to the National meeting. This has increased. 56 Home Demonstration members and 11 home demonstration agents now have made deposits for seats on the two busses. It has been our pride and joy to have one of the largest delegations from any State. Home demonstration women are getting in the habit of making tours and taking trips to see what goes on over the State and in other States. That is good. It is time Mississippi people learned more about how other people live and see more of the interesting things around the country. Perhaps one of the reasons we have not made more progress is because we stay too close at home and we have become more absorbed in our own problems and our own troubles. It might be wise for each county council to appoint a committee on Educational and Recreational tours. The home agent is glad to help and to stand by but a committee of your own members could be of tremendous help and probably work out more ways and means by which larger numbers of women could join in these tours. Possibly such a committee in the State Council might not be out of place.



We have employed now in Mississippi, 79 white home demonstration agents with around 35 assistant home demonstration agents. We have 53 Negro home demonstration agents and six assistants. This is the largest number of home demonstration agents ever employed in Mississippi. There are counties where we desperately need assistant home demonstration agents because of the heavy load and the possibilities for more organizations and for more activities. Boards of Supervisors have for the most part, been very cooperative. In cases where proper support and cooperation has not come to you from Boards of Supervisors, it is probably due to the fact that you have not stayed close enough to the Boards and have not informed them of your needs and your desires and of the value of the Home Demonstration Program. Maybe we have not told them enough about the accomplishments in home demonstration work. They are responsible for the spending of county funds and they have a right to know what goes on.

Now that there may be some tightening of county finances and some possibility of a decrease in general prosperity, it behooves the home demonstration clubs and councils to stay in close touch with your Boards. Let them know that you value home demonstration work and that you are doing your best to make it a profitable investment for the county. Let your State Legislators in on that secret too. They are interested in growth and development in Mississippi and have a right to know what you need and what you are doing.

The Home Demonstration Organization is growing. You have a responsibility to yourselves, your communities, your counties, and to the State. We have never relied on members alone for our strength. An organization in itself is not necessarily a good thing. Your ideals, your objectives, and the participation of the people in the program will make it worthwhile. You have built something strong and fine and useful in the State of Mississippi. Your efforts and your ambition and your hopes have gone into the building of this home demonstration organization. To you and to the oncoming leaders whom you train will depend the future of your organization and the good work which you have started. There will likely be along the way now and in the future, a few people who will wish to dictate your policies and your procedures. There will be those who wish to use your organization for trivial or unworthy ends. The preservation of your organization and the living work of your program will depend on your clear headed and independent thinking. This is truly a democratic organization. Your officers and leaders are elected. They serve because they love their homes and communities and are interested in the welfare of people. This organization is yours. It is Extension sponsored and Extension served but should not be Extension dominated. You show your strength and your progress by your increasing willingness to assume responsibility and to think and act for yourselves. Your main objective is education, better and broader education for more and more people.

I visited a State once where it seemed to me the organized farm women did nothing but make potato salad and serve sandwiches to big county and community meetings. Some speech maker was always referring to "Our good women." That is fine. Everyone aspires to be good and useful but there are more things to be done than staying behind the screen constantly mixing up food. The problems of today require the thinking of not only our "good ladies" but of our "good men." Families thinking and working together can accomplish more for themselves. Communities working together can speedily straighten out some of



their bad situations and their urgent problems. Nevertheless the women of any county or of any community have a definite and distinct responsibility and a very definite task to perform. You must make the woman's voice heard. If families are to be happy the home must furnish that happiness. If communities are to be prosperous, safe and happy, the homes through the efforts of women largely, must furnish that happiness and that safety.

Director Miller of Minnesota said a few years ago, "As the amount of labor necessary to do the work in the home and on the farm is reduced through the use of mechanized equipment and modern conveniences, more time will be available for self-improvement and recreation. We need a thorough study of the right kind of recreational facilities for rural people and how to make them available. We need to give time and attention to the development of the cultural side of rural life, and I am inclined to think that home demonstration groups in the future will give these an important place in their program. They will want to do this not only for their own sake but for the boys and girls who are growing up in rural homes in order that we may realize the full opportunities of country living.

And so there are many reasons why home demonstration work, which centers in the problems of the home, the family, and the community, should continue to expand for certainly these are the institutions that in the end will prove whether our democratic system can survive. On what farm women do will depend largely the quality of rural life, and it will rest with them, perhaps, more than with any other single group in our population to determine America's future. That is the high challenge to home demonstration workers, home economists, women leaders in our farm organizations, and to all groups interested in rural welfare." Someone else has said, "The future of this country depends on the vitality of its farm life, and this in turn depends largely on farm women." This is a fine tribute, says Dr. Miller, but it places a very large responsibility on farm women. They have measured up to this high standard in the past and we know that they will do so in the future."

Let me quote you the words of a distinguished and venerated pioneer in the Extension Service, Dr. C. B. Smith of the National Extension Service, says, "We enrich the lives of people when we help them to see and understand the world in which we live." "We enrich the lives of people when we give them courage and faith in themselves and the work they are doing." "And if we can help them to sing and play and have profitable converse with one another, we have brought them wealth and satisfaction and values which money cannot buy."

Will you not read with me a statement from a European woman after a visit to America? We have a precious heritage as citizens of a free and prosperous nation. We appreciate the privileges, we enjoy in good rural homes and communities. May your continued good works help to extend these blessings to all families in Mississippi, in America and in the world.



Excerpt for Article by Mrs. Anna Haag  
German Visitor of Stuttgart

Written for the Christian Science Monthly  
March 28, 1949

"I cannot bring back to my friends your undamaged houses with refrigerators, washing machines, dish washers, and the other conveniences for the housewives. I cannot load on my back your wonderful schools with all the playgrounds, swimming pools, workshops, and libraries, to put them down on German earth; and I cannot carry with me your well-oiled traffic system and the millions and millions of polished and comfortable private cars.

"I cannot bring back the wide and long skirts which you call "new look" nor the ocean of flashing and beautiful colored lights which make your towns like those in fairy tales. And I cannot move to Germany your wide and fruitful fields, your forests, your gigantic streams which provide you with enough electricity to run all your mills and machines and engines.

"But, happily, the most precious part of a true democracy costs no dollars. And of this part I am resolved to bring back as much as possible. I mean the spirit, the democratic attitude which rules in your houses, your schools, in your offices and mills, in your railways and busses. I mean further, the individual courage of the citizens."